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Inuit Health, Education and Country Food Harvesting

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The 2006 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) provides an extensive set of data about Metis, Inuit, and off-reserve First Nations adults 15 years and over and children 6 to 14, living in urban, rural, and northern locations across Canada. The APS was designed to provide a picture of the lifestyles and living conditions of Metis, Inuit, and First Nations peoples in Canada.

The survey was developed by Statistics Canada in partnership with the following national Aboriginal organizations: Congress of Aboriginal Peoples; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami; Metis National Council; National Association of Friendship Centres; and the Native Women's Association of Canada. The following federal departments sponsored the 2006 APS: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Health Canada, Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation and Canadian Heritage.

Inuit Health, Education and Country Food Harvesting

This fact sheet provides information about Inuit children aged 6 to 14 and those aged 15 and over, as reported in the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) and 2006 Census. Data on health and smoking for the total Canadian population are from the 2005 Canadian Community Health Survey. Inuit of the Western Arctic are known as "Inuvialuit". In this report, the term Inuit includes Inuvialuit.

In 2006, the Census enumerated about 10,700 Inuit children aged 6 to14 and 32,800 Inuit aged 15 and over.

The majority of Inuit (77%) aged six and over lived in Inuit Nunaat which means "Inuit homeland" in the Inuit language (map attached). Inuit Nunaat is comprised of four regions: the Inuvialuit region in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik in northern Quebec and Nunatsiavut in northern Labrador.

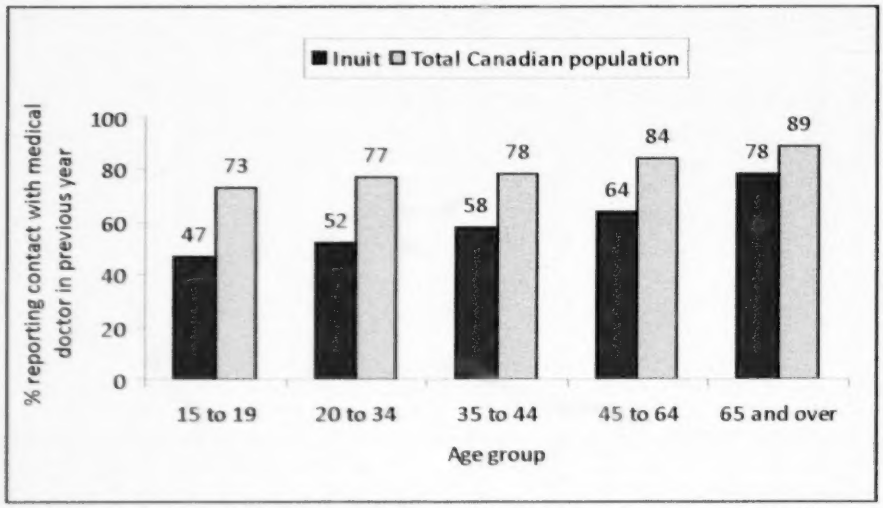
The remaining 23% were living in urban areas (17%) and rural areas (6%) outside of Inuit Nunaat.

Four Regions of Inuit Nunaat

Access to health care professionals

Few Inuit communities have hospitals and the point of first medical contact is usually with a nurse (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2004). Information from the 2006 APS shows that about half (49%) of Inuit aged 15 and over living in Inuit Nunaat had contact with a family doctor or specialist such as a surgeon in the past year compared with 73% of Inuit outside Inuit Nunaat. Inuit adults were less likely than those in the total Canadian population to have contact with a medical doctor. While 56% of Inuit adults in Canada had contact with a medical doctor in the past 12 months, the figure for adults in the total Canadian population was 79%, after controlling for age differences.

Chart 1
Contact with a medical doctor in the past 12 months, Inuit and total Canadian population by age group, 2005/2006



Sources: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2006 and Canadian Community Health Survey, 2005

Inuit adults in Nunatsiavut (44%) and Nunavut (47%) were less likely to have had contact with a doctor than those in Nunavik (54%) and the Inuvialuit region (59%). Among Inuit children in Canada aged 6 to 14, 35% had contact with a general practitioner or pediatrician while 26% had contact with another medical specialist.

Chronic conditions

The most commonly reported diagnosed chronic conditions among Inuit adults were arthritis/rheumatism (13%) and high blood pressure (12%). These figures were about the same as those for the total Canadian population, after controlling for age differences. For Inuit children, they were ear infections (15%), allergies (10%) and asthma (7%).

Smoking rates

In 2006, over half (58%) of Inuit aged 15 and over smoked on a daily basis, about the same percentage as in 2001. The daily smoking rate for Inuit was over three times that of all adults in Canada (17%). Inuit in Nunavik were the most likely to smoke daily (73%) while those outside Inuit Nunaat were the least likely (40%). In the other Inuit regions, about six in 10 were daily smokers.

Dental care and Inuit children

Most Inuit communities do not have a resident dentist. Instead, dentists from southern Canada fly into the communities on an irregular basis (Nunatsiavut Government, 2008). Just over six in 10 (63%) Inuit children aged 6 to 14 had received dental care in the past 12 months. Children in the Inuvialuit region (79%) and those outside Inuit Nunaat (77%) were the most likely to have received care in the past year. Inuit children in Nunatsiavut were the least likely (38%). The figure was about six in 10 in for both Nunavut (57%) and Nunavik (62%).

Reasons for not finishing elementary or secondary school

While a growing number of Inuit have been completing high school and moving on to post-secondary studies, many young Inuit leave the school system without a high school diploma. When asked why they did not finish elementary or high school, the most common responses given by Inuit men were that they wanted to work (18%), they were bored (18%) or they had to work (14%). The most commonly cited reason by Inuit women was pregnancy/taking care of children (24%). Reasons were similar across Inuit regions.

Food insecurity and Inuit children

About three in 10 (30%) Inuit children aged six to 14 were reported to have experienced being hungry at some point in their lives because the family had run out of food or money to buy food. In Nunavut, nearly four in 10 (39%) Inuit children had experienced hunger. One-third (33%) of Inuit children in Nunavik and 30% in Nunatsiavut had been hungry at some point.

In the Inuvialuit region (12%) and outside Inuit Nunaat (8%[E]), figures were lower.

Harvesting country food

In 2005, the majority of adults in Inuit Nunaat (68%) harvested country food which includes foods such as seal, whale, caribou, fish and berries. Inuit men were more likely to harvest than were Inuit women (74% versus 62%). The majority of Inuit men and women of all ages reported taking part in harvesting activities.

Table 1
Inuit harvesting country food in 2005 by age group and sex, Inuit Nunaat, 2006

	Total, both sexes	Men	Women
	percent		
Total, age 15 and over	68	74	62
15 to 24	60	67	53
25 to 34	72	78	66
35 to 44	73	81	67
45 to 54	74	77	70
55 and over	71	79	61

Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2006

Country food consumption and sharing

Sixty five percent of Inuit in Inuit Nunaat lived in homes where at least half of the meat and fish consumed was country food.

Table 2
Amount of meat and fish eaten in the household that is country food, Inuit adults aged 15 and over, by region, 2006

	Total, Inuit Nunaat	Nunatsiavut	Nunavik	Nunavut	Inuvialuit region
	percent				
None	1[E]	x	x	1[E]	x
Less than half	27	18	24	29	31
Subtotal, at least half	**65**	**79**	**59**	**66**	**66**
About half	29	40	26	28	28
More than half	37	40	33	38	38
Don't know/not stated	7	x	16	4	x

[E] – Use with caution.
x – Suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the Statistics Act.
Note: Figures may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
Source: Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2006

Many Inuit children eat country food on a regular basis. At the Canada level, 49% of Inuit children ate wild meat at least 3 days per week. In Inuit Nunaat, this rose to 59% compared to just over 10% outside Inuit Nunaat.

A strong tradition of food sharing is reflected in the APS data. The large majority of Inuit adults in Inuit Nunaat – about eight in ten – said that they lived in households that shared country food with others. Sharing country food was a common practice across Inuit Nunaat – the majority of Inuit adults in each of the four regions reported living in homes where country food was shared with people in other households.

References

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2004. "Backgrounder on Inuit Health". Report prepared for discussion at the Health Sectoral meetings.

Nunatsiavut Government 2008, "Nunatsiavut Dental Program".

How to obtain more information

Specific inquiries about this product and related statistics or services should be directed to: Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division, Statistics Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0T6 by telephone: 613-951-5979 or by e-mail at sasd-dssea@statcan.gc.ca.

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